



NEW HAMPSHIRE DIVISION OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES

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REPORT ON THE ODIORNE HOMESTEAD ODIORNE'S POINT RYE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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This report is based on a brief inspection of the Odiorne Homestead made on the morning of March 10, 1999. Also present at the inspection were J. Stephen Belcher, nephew of Ralph Brown; Tom Mansfield and Seth Prescott of the Department of Resources and Economic Development; Karle McKinster of Sherman Greiner Hallé, architects of Concord; and Karen Burnett-Kurie of Appledore Engineering of Portsmouth.

The purpose of the inspection was to develop a general understanding of the architectural evolution and character of the Odiorne Homestead. Ralph Brown has recently left the premises to live in a nursing home, and this visit was the first opportunity to inspect the house and barn briefly.

Summary: According to the family genealogy, the Odiorne Homestead was built around 1800. The house was remodeled around 1850. This remodeling included replacement of the roof structure, rebuilding of the central chimney, replacement of almost all interior and exterior joiner's work and, reportedly, the addition of a one-story wing. Although a United States Army Coast Artillery Corps unit occupied the house during World War II, the building retains most of the interior finish that was installed in the mid-nineteenth-century remodeling. The house remains in good structural condition and retains integrity for the period around 1850.

The barn is a gable-front barn with a longitudinal driveway. Its frame is partly obscured by wallboard installed during World War II. Based on the partial evidence of what framing is visible, it appears that the barn may date from the early part of the nineteenth century, possibly being an English barn of about 1800 that was remodeled sometime after 1830. The barn was altered by the addition of modern framing during World War II and

was further remodeled on the interior by Ralph Brown in the decades after the war. Attached to the rear of the barn is a greenhouse addition dating from the 1950s.

The Odiorne Homestead was declared eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places by the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources in March, 1993.

Description of the House: The Odiorne Homestead is a two-story, framed dwelling with a gable roof and a central chimney. The house has a one-story summer kitchen wing that extends northerly off the northeast corner of the main dwelling. The main house stands over a fully-excavated cellar with walls of naturally-fractured local stone. The cellar walls have been pointed on their inner faces and whitewashed. Above grade, the house is underpinned with slabs of granite that have been split with plug drills and plugs-and-feathers, denoting a quarrying date after 1830. The basement of the ell also extends under the entire structure and is accessible from the main basement through a narrow doorway in the foundation wall. The ell cellar contains a brick water cistern and a brick-walled root cellar. The root cellar was once reached by a stairway, since removed, leading down from a room above.

A wide panel of concrete fills a former opening near the center of the western foundation wall of the main house. This opening may have been created (or filled) by the Coast Artillery during World War II. The cellar presently has no outside entrance areaway.

According to the *Genealogy of the Odiorne Family in America* (1875; revised edition, 1967, pp. 228-230),

the house which stands there [at Odiorne's Point] in 1967 was built about 1800. It has a wing which was added about 1850. Although built as a farm house, not as a city mansion, it is quite large. It stands at a spot where the road from Portsmouth at one time curved to the shore, [which is] some 500 feet away. In 1900 the State of New Hampshire built a road along the shore, and joined it to the old road at the spot where it formerly curved east to the ocean. The new road passes by the side of the Odiorne house. This is the third Odiorne house to have been erected in this immediate area. It was continuously occupied by the family bearing the Odiorne name from the time it was built until the year 1942.

With the advent of World War II, the United States Government deemed it necessary to improve the fortifications commanding the approaches to the Portsmouth Navy Yard. . . . So the Government acquired this property and named it Fort Dearborn. Giant 16" coast defense guns and other equipment were installed. The Government acquisition on Odiorne's Point included Mr. Odiorne's home and property and 24 other properties. Many fine old homes were demolished to make way for military facilities, but the Odiorne house was converted to a barracks. In so doing, the house was subjected to many indignities, walls were torn out to make larger rooms, the beautiful ship stairway was boarded up and plastered over, and

soldiers now commanded the lovely house where heretofore gentle folk resided and raised their families. . . .

There is no reason to doubt the construction date of about 1800 for the main house, although structural evidence that might support that date is covered by the finish of the house. Virtually all interior joiner's work that is visible today dates from about 1850. The frame of the carcass of the house is a heavy one with projecting corner posts. The first floor membrane is composed of hewn girders into which rounded sleepers are framed with butt-cogged joints. This type of construction would be typical of the period around 1800, but cannot be dated closely.

The roof frame of the house was entirely changed during a major remodeling of c. 1850. The present frame is composed of a series of hewn common rafters, placed somewhat more than three feet on centers. The tops of these rafters are apparently nailed together, without a ridgepole. Roof sheathing is applied horizontally, and is generally uniform except in a few places where the roof boards were apparently removed and turned over for better nailing during a re-shingling at some time.

A roof frame of around 1800 in Portsmouth would be composed of six sets of rafters with purlins spanning the distance between them, and with roof sheathing boards running from ridgepole to eaves. Roofs of common rafters like the one now seen at the Odiorne Homestead began to appear in New Hampshire during the 1830s.

As it stands today, the Odiorne House has a five-bay façade facing south. Because the road leading from Portsmouth approaches the house from the north and formerly extended only to the house, then turning east to approach the shore, it is possible that the façade of the house was on the north side before the remodeling of 1850. The present chimney, front staircase, and all visible internal features of the building date from 1850, and it would have been possible to reorient the façade and to reverse room usage during such an extensive remodeling.

All characteristics of the façade derive from the Greek Revival period. Window sashes are six-over-six units, and have an ogee muntin profile that dates between 1845 and about 1880, as indicated by shading on the following page. The front doorway has five-light sidelights with the same muntin profile. The doorway itself has heavy Doric pilasters that support an architrave and a deeply-projecting cornice topped with a crown moulding.

Exterior window casings are uniform around the house. They are composed a square-edged flat side casings topped by somewhat thicker top casings that provide a slight shadow line. The top casings have projecting caps. Strapping has been attached to the side casings to provide a seat for triple-track storm windows. Windows formerly had louvered window blinds.

The east side elevation of the house, facing the State Boulevard of 1900 (Route 1A), has a door and a window (enclosed beneath a one-story porch) on the first story and two

windows above. The attic has a single gable window. All windows have the muntin profile shown on the accompanying page.

The wing of the house is placed so that half its width projects beyond the eastern wall of the main house. The southern wall of the wing has a door opening onto the porch. The eastern wall of the wing has two windows facing the state boulevard.

The rear or north elevation of the main house has somewhat irregular fenestration. Near the center of this side, in the chimney bay, two windows light both the first and second stories. Another first-floor window in the rear wall lights the kitchen, while another second-floor window pierces the wall of the main house adjacent to the intersecting roof of the one-story wing. The northern gable wall of the wing has two small windows on the first story and a full-size six-over-six window in the gable.

The western elevation of the main house has two windows on the first story (the northernmost window lighting a small bedchamber off the kitchen) and two on the second story; the latter are not located directly above those below. The western gable has a nine-over-six window (not examined), which could retain original sashes dating from about 1800.

The western elevation of the wing is the most altered area of the exterior. It has two windows and a rear door on the first floor, and two added shed-roofed dormers, of differing sizes, on the second. The dormer that is closest to the main house is attached to the rear wall of the latter. A single-flue kitchen chimney pierces the western slope of the ell roof adjacent to the side wall of this dormer.

On the interior, the rooms are arranged around the central chimney in a traditional two-room-deep floor plan. As noted above, the chimney appears to have been rebuilt totally around 1850. The chimney base in the cellar appears too small for a chimney stack of circa 1800 and seems to be adapted to supporting the present stack rather than an older one. In the attic, old bricks, some with a soot residue and some retaining clay mortar, have been re-used in the present stack, showing that the current chimney is largely composed of bricks salvaged from the original stack. Some of these bricks are soft, and were probably salvaged from deep within the original chimney. In their present situation, some have spalled from moisture running down the flues.

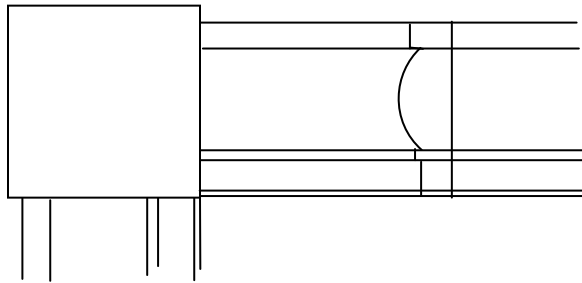
Fireplaces on the first floor are uniformly small in size. There are three: one in the sitting room on the east, one in the parlor on the west, and one in the kitchen on the north. The latter is quite small, and a stovepipe thimble above it suggests the possibility that a cast iron range was installed here shortly after the mid-nineteenth-century remodeling. To the left of the kitchen fireplace is an oven whose door bears the words, "IRON FOUNDRY SOUTH NEWMARKET, N.H. 1849."

The only fireplace on the second floor is in the parlor chamber on the west. The sitting room chamber on the east has a closet in the comparable location. The closet door

appears to date from about 1850, suggesting that this bedroom never had a fireplace after the remodeling.

Directly in front of the chimney is a front stairhall. Although the walls of this entry are rectangular, the staircase is a spiral that winds around a square post. The only balustrade is a short section near the second floor level, and this has round turned balusters and a simple moulded handrail. Altered floor framing visible from the cellar suggests that there may once have been a cellar stairway beneath an original staircase (probably a triple-run) in this location.

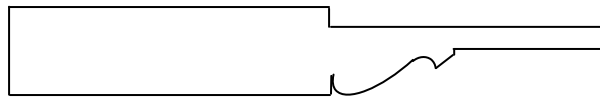
The front room on the west appears to have been the parlor of the house. Its door and window casings are heavily-moulded with the following profile, and have square corner blocks in the upper corners.



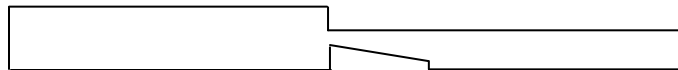
The mantelpiece in this room is the most elaborate in the house, having pilasters at each side with the following profile:



The doors throughout the front of the house are typical Greek Revival four-panel doors, with the longer panels at the top and with applied Grecian ogee mouldings, as follows:

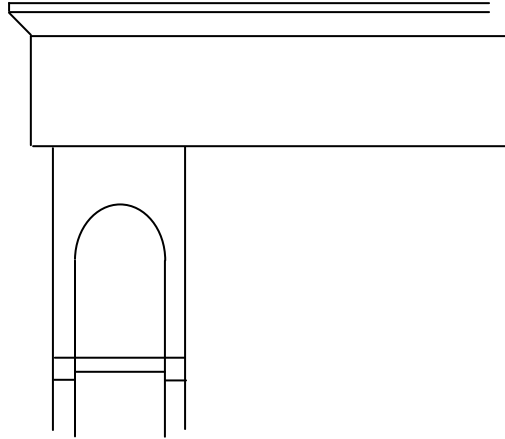


Doors in the kitchen and summer kitchen wing are four-panel doors without applied mouldings, as follows:



A few doors in the house, including those leading from the upper entry to the front bedchambers, are either modern units or are doors from another house. These doors are in locations where the Coast Artillery evidently removed original doors during the war.

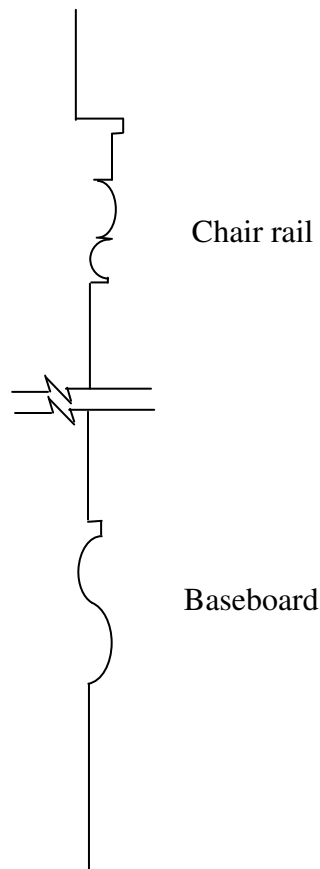
The front sitting room on the eastern side of the first story has woodwork of a distinctly Greek Revival character, but without the mouldings seen in the opposite room. Door and window casings, and mantelpiece detailing, are all flat stock, but have recessed panels with arched tops, as follows:



The sitting room chamber above this room has nearly identical detailing.

The parlor chamber has casings that are similar to those shown for the room below it.

This bedroom has a more elaborate wainscoting than is seen elsewhere in the house, as shown below. In most other rooms, the dado is flat and has simply-moulded baseboards and chair rails.



Behind the original bedchambers on the second story are two additional bedrooms. At least some portions of their walls are composed of Celotex or a similar World War II-era wallboard. These rooms may lie within the area where the Coast Artillery is said to have converted the second story of the dwelling to a “barracks” during the war. The presence of new doors in some second-story rooms also suggests that the Army removed doors here to improve circulation through this floor. Except for these features, however, there is little sign that the second story was seriously damaged or stripped during the war.

As noted above, the wing of the house is said to date from about 1850. The presence of the cistern in its basement, coupled with the presence of a rather large chimney foundation there, suggests that the wing was added as a summer kitchen, and that it may originally have had a second oven, a cauldron or set kettle, and a scullery. It appears that most brick features of such a summer kitchen have been removed above the large brick chimney foundation. This foundation apparently supports only a single-flue stove chimney (not examined) at present.

Plumbing evidence suggests that this wing was used as a latrine or toilet area during World War II. When Ralph Brown remodeled the wing as a kitchen after the war, he installed the manufactured stainless steel kitchen sink that remains there. Mr. Brown has stated that this was the first model of stainless steel sink to be introduced after the war.

The house is heated by a one-pipe steam system supplied by an oil-fired boiler.

Description of the Barn: As presently seen, the Odiorne barn is a gable-front barn with a broad front door facing easterly, toward the State Boulevard. The walls of the barn are presently covered with vinyl siding. Until about 1993, the walls were covered with wooden shingles, which probably remain beneath the vinyl covering. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles. These are in failing condition, and leaks are prevalent on the north slope of the roof. There is at least one hole of some four inches in diameter in the northern slope. Water damage is evident to the ceiling materials on the interior of the barn, but no assessment can yet be made of decay that may have occurred to the wall plates from prolonged water leakage.

The frame of the barn was laid out with the scribe rule rather than the square rule. In this framing method, each joint is individually scribed and cut, and each joint therefore differs from all others. Use of the scribe rule framing technique ordinarily denotes carpentry of 1830 or earlier. Yet most barns built before 1830 were planned as English barns, with their principal doors in one of the long sides, beneath the eaves. It is therefore possible that the Odiorne barn began its existence as an English barn, and that it was reconfigured to its present gable-front plan after 1830, perhaps at about the time that the dwelling was remodeled in the mid-1800s. The evolution of the barn needs much further study. Investigation is made more difficult by the present of much modern framing and by the fact that interior wall and roof surfaces are largely covered by wallboard installed during World War II, or by plywood installed after the war by Ralph Brown.

As noted above, the framing joints that are visible in the barn bear Roman numerals, denoting the use of the scribe rule method of framing, which diminished in popularity after about 1830.

The hayloft areas on both sides of the present longitudinal driveway are framed with modern, two-inch scantling. This framing may have been installed by the Coast Artillery during the war, or by Ralph Brown after he purchased the property in 1949.

Along the northern side and the western end of the building, the second floor of the barn, formed by these modern hayloft floors, was enclosed with plywood walls and finished into rooms by Ralph Brown. Two of these rooms, along the north wall, serve as libraries and offices. The area at the western end of the barn has been finished as a bedroom and bathroom.

Attached to the rear or western gable end of the barn is a one-story wooden gable-roofed addition housing an oil-fired boiler. Beyond this addition is a greenhouse that is heated by the boiler.

Significance of the property: Odiorne's Point was first occupied by David Thomson in 1623; it is the site of the first mainland settlement in New Hampshire. John Odiorne, a farmer, acquired the property in 1660. The Odiorne family name was connected with the site by the 1700s, and family ownership continued without a break until the United States Army acquired the property as part of Fort Dearborn, a coastal defense emplacement, in 1942.

No buildings from the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries are known to exist on the property, but archaeological sites may survive from both with the Thomson settlement of 1623 and with the Odiorne family after 1660. The present dwelling is thought to be the third Odiorne house on the farm. It retains the overall appearance and proportions of a federal-period, central-chimney farmhouse. As noted above, the house was remodeled around 1850 and today retains a wide variety of Greek Revival features, some of them unusual or unique in the Portsmouth region. A family-owned tide-mill formerly operated on adjacent Seavey's Creek.

Estuarine farmsteads like the Odiorne Farm have become extremely rare. Taken together, the house as remodeled, the barn, outlying archaeological sites, and the surrounding farmlands and salt marsh, all preserve rare or unique features of a mid-nineteenth-century seacoast farm.

The Odiorne Homestead has been determined individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under three criteria: Criterion A, C, and D.

Under Criterion A, the property is eligible because of its significance for early settlement and agriculture and because it is associated with events and trends that make a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. The period of its significance under Criterion A is from circa 1800 to circa 1942.

As noted above, the buildings that exist on the property today were built circa 1800 and later. The house and barn, with the surrounding land that is historically connected with Odiorne ownership, represent a coastal farm. Coastal farms were common in nineteenth-century New Hampshire, but have become increasingly rare as attrition and development have destroyed all but a few. The Odiorne Homestead is an excellent example of a coastal farm with its principal buildings and land preserved intact. The property is bounded by the ocean on the east and a salt marsh to the west. A tide-mill (near the highway bridge north of the house) once supplemented the agricultural pursuits of the Odiorne family with the capacity to saw lumber and grind grain. The farm also included “flakes” for salting and drying codfish, pastures for the grazing of cattle upon English grasses, and salt marsh which provided salt hay, an important coastal crop and food supplement for cattle.

Under Criterion C, the farmstead is eligible for listing in the National Register for its architecture. Its periods of significance under this criterion are circa 1800 (the date of the house) and circa 1850 (the date of remodeling of the house).

The Odiorne House is a good example of a two-and-a-half story, wood-framed, vernacular central-chimney farmhouse. This house type was common in urban and rural areas of New Hampshire during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The house was remodeled around 1850 with new exterior and interior wooden detailing. The mid-nineteenth-century modernization is significant because of its embodiment of the Greek Revival style of architecture. Due to economic stagnation from the 1820s until the 1850s (the period when the Greek Revival style was introduced and reached maturity in New Hampshire), very few houses in the Portsmouth area were embellished with Greek Revival detailing. The Odiorne Homestead is unusual and significant because it is an intact dwelling that was remodeled in an architectural style that is rare in the region.

The Odiorne Homestead is significant under Criterion D for its archaeological potential. This potential derives, first, from the fact that the property was the site of the first mainland occupancy by European settlers in present-day New Hampshire. Its archaeological significance derives, second, from the fact that it was occupied continuously between 1660 and 1942 by a single family that farmed the land, creating no major disturbances that might have damaged archaeological resources.

The two known disturbances that may have had an impact on archaeology were 1) the building of the State Boulevard (now Route 1A) through the property in 1900, and 2) construction of Fort Dearborn in 1942. Despite the potential for archaeological damage from these two major undertakings, the property today is known to possess several archaeological sites in addition to its house, barn, and outbuilding locations. These include the cemetery, which is widely believed to be the oldest in New Hampshire; an early stoned well or spring, often referred to as an “Indian” well; and at least one seventeenth-century house depression.

Some archaeologists believe that the property offers the potential for documenting David Thomson's "great house" of 1623. The property also offers the potential of documenting, through archaeological remains, the history of tidewater farming of the Odiorne family, and, through investigation of the seventeenth-century remains at "Flake Hill," the commercial fishing activities of the family. The site may also contain traces of an eighteenth-century blacksmith shop, of other farm outbuildings, and of nineteenth-century tide-mills.

The potential of documenting the prehistoric occupancy of an estuarine site is a third area of significance under Criterion D. Prior to European settlement, the present-day Odiorne Homestead was occupied by Native Americans for an undetermined length of time that certainly included the Woodland Period. A shell midden has been confirmed in the vicinity of nearby Frost Point, surface artifacts have been found on well-drained elevated features like the area above Seavey's Creek, and some pottery was recovered near the "Indian" well or spring. The potential for documenting Woodland and Contact Period Indian settlement on the property is very high.

The period of significance under National Register Criterion D would therefore extend from prehistory to 1942, the date of public acquisition of the property.

Recommendations for Further Study: The initial inspection of the Odiorne Homestead on March 10, 1999, represented only the most preliminary reconnaissance of this complex property. Much has yet to be learned about occupancy of the site by Native Americans, by David Thomson, by the Odiorne Family, by the United States Army Coast Artillery Corps, and by Ralph Brown.

It is important to begin to develop long-range plans for the preservation, use, and interpretation of this site now. At the same time, the superficial level of current information about all of these periods needs to be improved. Independent researchers are currently trying to learn more about David Thomson and about the Odiorne family and their occupancy of the site. Public records should also offer the potential of developing much information about Fort Dearborn. The necessary research, gathering of pictorial and cartographic data, and analysis and writing in each of these areas, however, will require a large investment of time by many people in the years to come.

Independent of this background research is the need to protect and preserve the physical assets of the site. As noted above, the Odiorne barn is now endangered by major roof leaks. A sudden increase in public access to the site could similarly subject both the buildings and the grounds to additional dangers of vandalism, theft, and ecological damage.

The New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources suggests the following priorities for protection of the physical assets of the site: 1. immediate repair of the barn roof and of broken glass in the greenhouse; 2. immediate attention to other threats to the property such as unreliable heating systems, other areas of water infiltration, lack of security against breaking and entering, etc.; 3. occupancy of the site by a resident caretaker as

soon as is legally possible; 4. limitation of public access to the property until a detailed master plan can be developed; 5. a thorough inventory of the physical assets of the site, including buildings, grounds, and plant materials; and 6. development of an appropriate interpretive and educational plan for the property, taking advantage of the knowledge gained by independent researchers and information assembled under recommendation 5, above.

To accomplish recommendation 5, above, the Division of Historical Resources recommends that complete historic structure reports be compiled for the house, barn, and other structures on the property. As defined by the National Park Service, a historic structure report typically includes the following elements:

Historic Structure Report

I. Table of Contents

II. Foreword or introduction, when appropriate

Purpose of the report
Preservation objectives

III. Brief history of the property

Significance and historic events, persons associated with the property, ownership history, etc.

IV. Construction History (Original)

Chronology
Historical documentation (letters, diaries, bills, accounts, vouchers, newspaper articles, etc.)
Site work (materials, construction, unusual craftsmanship, etc.)
Craftsmen/Builders/Architects associated with the property
Early views, photographs, maps, etc.

V. Alterations and Changes (Physical Evolution of the Structure)

Chronology, description, and documentation
Construction-related documents, contemporary descriptions, early photographs, architectural investigation, archaeology

VI. Exterior of the Building

Assessment of the exterior features of the building and the site; identification of those features that are character-defining and must therefore be preserved in the course of project work.

Roof, walls, foundation, chimneys, windows and doors, entrances, porches, porte-cochères, paints and finishes/details/embellishments, mortar analysis (if appropriate)

VII. *Interior of Building (Architectural description of the interior fabric)*

Assessment of the interior features and identification of those features that are character-defining and therefore must be preserved in the course of the project work

Mechanical systems (heating, lighting, plumbing, electrical, etc.)

Room-by-room analysis, identifying materials, construction techniques, mouldings, paint finishes

Floors, walls, ceiling, woodwork, doors, windows.

VIII. *Existing Conditions*

Analysis of existing conditions (damage, structural problems, deterioration of materials, etc.)

Needs for architectural conservation

IX. *Proposed Project Work*

Recommendations for necessary work based on existing conditions and preservation objectives (list of work priorities, phasing, estimated costs)

Architectural work

Structural work

Mechanical work

Archaeology

Other work (such as special finishes)

X. *Measured Drawings, Architectural Plans, Elevations, Sections, Details*

XI. *Photographs of Details and Elevations*

XII. *Outline of needs for future ongoing maintenance, preservation, protection, or cyclical maintenance of the historical resource*

XIII. *Bibliography*

XIV. *References*

XV. *Appendices (if needed)*

To protect the man-made assets of the property and yet adapt it for new uses, the Division of Historical Resources recommends adoption of the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* in any future treatments of these assets. These *Standards*

are guidelines that are applied in the care and rehabilitation of any historical properties that are affected by federal funding or permits. While the use of these *Standards* is not mandatory for historical properties not affected by federal funding or permits, the *Standards* have proven to be appropriate guidelines for the preservation and re-use of any historical property. The *Standards* are not rigid rules, but rather establish a philosophical approach to the use of historical assets.

The ten *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* are:

1. A property shall be used for its historical purpose or shall be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
2. The historical character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historical materials, or the alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property, shall be avoided.
3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Alterations that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements taken from other historical buildings, shall not be undertaken.
4. Most properties change over time. Changes to a property that have acquired historical significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.
5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques, or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property, shall be preserved.
6. Deteriorated historical features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires the replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, scale and proportion, color, texture, and, where possible, in materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
7. Chemical or mechanical treatments, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historical materials shall not be used.
8. Archaeological resources shall be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures shall be undertaken.
9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historical materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize a property. New work shall be differentiated from the old, and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features of the historical property so as to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historical property and its environment would be unimpaired.

To further accomplish recommendation 5 on page 11 (an inventory of the physical assets of the property) the Division recommends an updating of the plant and wildlife inventories that have been compiled for Odiorne's Point over the years, if such an update is not already in hand.

Further, the Division recommends an archaeological assessment of Odiorne's Point before any changes are made to the land.

The Division will be happy to provide further suggestions on any aspect of the identification, protection, care and interpretation of the assets of Odiorne's Point.